

Abstract 395

TITLE: Relationship Power and Women's HIV/STD Risk: Testing a New Measure

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OBJECTIVES: Many researchers have proposed that women are restricted from negotiating safer sex because of gender based power imbalances. However, few studies have empirically tested this Relationship, and little agreement exists regarding either the definition of this power or how it operates to influence sexual decisionmaking. The current study addresses these deficiencies by providing a theoretically based and rigorously tested measure of relationship power dynamics: the Relationship Power Scale (RPS).

METHODS: Six focus group discussions (N=56) were conducted to generate items for both Spanish and English language scales. To evaluate specific psychometric properties of the RPS, it was then administered to a census sample (N=388) of women aged 18-45 at a community health clinic. All eligible women had a primary sexual partner and were not attempting to become pregnant.

RESULTS: The final 23 item RPS possesses internal reliability (coefficient alpha = .84) and both predictive and construct validity. Factor analyses support two subscales measuring issues related to (1.) control over the relationship and (2.) decisionmaking, dominance within the relationship. Both Spanish and English language versions have similar properties. As expected, the RPS was positively associated with years of education ($p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($p < .05$), and was negatively associated with physical abuse ($p < .05$) and forced sex ($p < .05$). Respondents with high relationship power were six times as likely to report consistent condom use as those with low relationship power ($p < .01$).

CONCLUSIONS: Suggestions for interventions addressing sexual negotiation issues and STD/HIV prevention are discussed.

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